



Serving Montana...Myrna Burgess

Service: Senior Corps, Foster Grandparent Program, Northern Cheyenne Tribe, Lame Deer

Three Words that describe Myrna:

- ⚙ **Compassionate**
- ⚙ **Dedicated**
- ⚙ **Visionary**

Myrna's Service Story: Being called "Grandma" comes naturally to Myrna Burgess and when she was honored with the ServeMontana Award in February, she stated, "I guess I will be a Grandma forever" in her acceptance speech. Although she has three children and nine grandchildren, she is family to so many more. Myrna has cared for 1,860 youth since becoming a foster mom in 1975, a position she retired when she was 62 years old. Now, as a Foster Grandparent volunteer with St. Vincent Healthcare, she continues her wonderful work with children in her community. Serving with the Foster Grandparent Program is a natural extension of her lifetime of service and she also serves as a "Wisdom Keeper" for Head Start, a Sunday school teacher and a volunteer for the Boys and Girls Club. Myrna incorporates cultural education into her mentoring activities and can frequently be seen sitting with a group of children, passing on stories of their Cheyenne heritage. She has served as a cultural trainer for the last 30 years, devoting her time to teaching the Cheyenne culture to the young. Myrna believes, "we all need to do our part in life, even if we don't have parents to tell us these things."



Myrna Burgess receiving the 2010 ServeMontana Award from Lieutenant Governor Bohlinger, First Lady Nancy Schweitzer and Commission Chair Chris Kolstad



Making a Difference: Myrna is contributing to the success of the Foster Grandparent Program. Through her service, Myrna touches the lives of hundreds of children and serves as a role model for civic engagement in her community. She has become the program's catalyst for recruitment and partnership-building within the reservation and was key to the program's recent expansion to the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation. To help facilitate that expansion, the program received the help of an AmeriCorps VISTA and Myrna works closely with the VISTA as a mentor. She provides cultural education and helps the VISTA establish partnerships with local nonprofits to strengthen the program and provide more services for children. Throughout all her activities, Myrna inspires others to serve in conjunction with her teachings on Northern Cheyenne traditions. As Myrna points out, "No matter



what kids do, they're still Indian children. They need to be proud of that. They also need to know that whatever they want to be—they can be." Her vision and drive to see a bright future for all children serves as a model for other elders and most importantly, for the children she serves.

"Volunteerism" ...in Myrna's words: I never think about what I do as volunteerism. It's just something I do to help others. It comes naturally. I like to help people, especially when I see them struggle. It's not good to sit back and do nothing. I want to make things better for others. I think it's a feeling that comes from inside a person. When you give, you are part of something and you can enjoy the happiness you bring to other people. It's important for people to "give" to others, not to just take.

The Governor's Office of Community Service and the Montana Commission on Community Service greatly appreciates Myrna's contribution to her community.

Thank you to Barbara Brady for letting us know about Myrna!

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